

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 29, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Administrator Paul Kiecker
Food Safety and Inspection Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue and Administrator Kiecker,

We write to urge you to consider regulatory action, while still ensuring a safe food supply for the American public, to provide more meat and poultry producers with direct access to the national commercial market given concerns regarding the domestic food supply due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We share your dedication to protecting the public's food products and want to ensure public health through the safe processing of meat and poultry during this unprecedented national crisis.

We write with concern, however, regarding the growing rate of COVID-19 infections among U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) inspectors. The impacts of infection among FSIS inspectors, in addition to the disruption COVID-19 related closures and modifications at processing plants in various states are already having on the U.S. food supply chain, are extremely troubling. Given these circumstances, we urge you to use lawful regulatory action to provide more meat and poultry producers with direct access to the national commercial market, while ensuring food safety, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With national stay-at-home orders and mandated non-essential business closures in place, demand for meat and poultry from within the restaurant industry and school systems is down. At the same time, meat and poultry stocked in grocery stores are struggling to meet the rising demand. According to USDA's Cold Storage report, which indicates meat and poultry freezer stocks remain stable, it is clear supply is not the problem. Rather, large processing plant closures across the nation are slowing meat slaughter and poultry processing, creating challenges for both

consumers and producers. In Colorado, a meat packing plant in Greeley, Colorado was temporarily closed for two weeks in order to isolate infections that were discovered among workers. COVID-19 infection among FSIS inspectors will only exacerbate the current supply chain disruptions.

We remain committed to ensuring our nation continues to have a safe, abundant, and affordable food supply during the pandemic, which includes the need for worker safety. Given this, we urge you to consider lawful regulatory action to provide more meat and poultry producers with direct access to the national commercial market, while maintaining food safety. Should the USDA need additional authorities to ensure a sustainable U.S. food supply chain during COVID-19 or any future public health emergency, we urge you to communicate those needs to Congress for consideration in future legislation.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to a prompt reply.

Sincerely,



Scott R. Tipton
Member of Congress



Cory Gardner
U.S. Senator



Ken Buck
Member of Congress



Michael F. Bennet
U.S. Senator